



# THT property Plus

“Preparedness is the only way we can combat a natural disaster.”  
— John Quinlan



## ARE WE PREPARED FOR disaster?

Himalayan News Service  
Kathmandu

According to the *Global Report on Disaster Risk*, Nepal ranks in the 11th position in terms of earthquake risk. Professionals worry that a catastrophe will ensue after a major quake, as the country lacks disaster preparedness and thorough planning in core as well as sub-urban areas.

Dr Bijaya K Shrestha, manager at Town Development Fund, states that dense population, rapid urbanisation without proper infrastructure development, haphazardly built buildings flouting the National Building Code (NBC), among others are reasons Kathmandu valley residents are at higher risk. While development of infrastructure was unavoidable in Kathmandu as it is the capital and centre of all activities, Shrestha says, “The government has not planned and strictly implemented regulations to mitigate risk and no concrete steps have been taken for disaster preparedness.”

Noriyuki Okabe, vice chairman of JIA Anti-Disaster Measures Committee, opines that the first priority of any government should be to prepare for disasters and safeguard its cities and citizens. Stating that building regulations in Japan were amended following the tsunami of 2011, he informs that they have adopted designs that help buildings withstand major tremors. Additionally, evacuation alternatives, use of seismic isolators and spring rubbers in the buildings along with earthquake resistant fixtures help to safeguard

### Experts stress on the need for the government to wake up to the imminent threat of a major quake hitting Nepal

buildings. “However, the government of Nepal should wake up to possibility of looming disaster should a major quake hit the country and take corrective steps as soon as possible,” he says.

Okabe further suggests all the concerned stakeholders to do the needful in making all structures, including cultural heritage, public and residential buildings, earthquake resistant because the country cannot afford rebuilding and restoring the whole city. “If existing buildings are vulnerable, retrofitting and reinforcement work should start along with planning of evacuation routes for various areas,” he opines.

He also warns of the possibility of roads being inaccessible, should a major earthquake occur. “Hence, the government should formulate and strictly enforce special policies for buildings alongside roads to be quake resistant,” he suggests.

Shoeki Kurakawa, ex-chairman of JIA Anti-Disaster Measures Committee, also highlights the need to follow proper engineering techniques, the use of quality materials, focus on earthquake resistant designs and employing of skilled workers during construction. He further suggests reinforced steel bars to strengthen buildings.

Kurakawa says that proper use of glazing materials such as ACP, glass, aluminium, et cetera could be safer



than using traditional heavy materials like bricks, cement, wood, mud, et cetera.

Swarup Gurung Koney, president of the Society of Nepalese Architects, says that as people are more aware these days and seek help from professionals during construction, the structures built in the last 12 years

are safer. However, admitting that there is room for improvement, he adds, “The government as well as professionals have to join hands to make the city more beautiful and secure.” He also states that the government should make the NBC mandatory for any construction and have master plan for disaster preparedness.



File photo: THT

### What about our cultural heritage?

Known as ‘The city of temples’, Kathmandu boasts of a large number of temples and historical buildings that add to the cultural and historical significance of the city. However, with the disaster preparedness plans not in place, there is imminent danger to these important structures.

Bharat Raut, deputy director general of Department of Archaeology, says,

“The government has not done anything till date for risk reduction and management of cultural heritage sites.” Stating that the concept of disaster management is comparatively new in Nepal, Raut says, “It has only been around four years that people started to talk about the disaster management and there’s no law as such for mitigating the risks to the heritage sites.”



### ARCHITECTURE

## Change for the better and the worse

preserving monuments and artefacts. The understanding of the past depends on the filters that skew the vision of the observer. The filters might provide different perspectives, depending on the observer’s ethnicity, religion and possibly even language. The perspective of the observer might also depend on an understanding of political, economic or social gain or loss. There are certain aspects of the past that particular persons or communities would like to highlight, which could be considered unacceptable to others.

Kai Weise

Kathmandu

The dilemma of conservation is the unattainable aspiration of stopping the effects of time on objects of great value. The first paragraph of the 1964 *Venice Charter* states that it is our duty to hand the ancient monuments on to future generations ‘in the full richness of their authenticity’. This is still a valid statement, though the understanding of the concept of authenticity has changed drastically over the past half century.

Monuments and artefacts are usually considered evidence of a culture of a specific time somewhere in the past. The information provided by this evidence must not be contaminated. We use this information to get closer to the truth of what the past was like to better understand our present culture and society. Coming to terms with the past is, however, more complex than just

Coming to terms with the past is more complex than just preserving monuments and artefacts

These value judgements can be as diverse as the number of communities that exist in the world. We have come to understand that this diversity must be respected. This has led to a major transformation in our approach to dealing with heritage monuments and artefacts. In 1994, the *Nara Document on Authenticity* was drafted to pave the way for a more accommodating approach to conserving cultural heritage, by bringing ‘greater respect for cultural and heritage diversity to conservation practice’. This means that heritage properties must be ‘considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong’. The ‘respon-

sibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it’. A delicate balance must be achieved between the values of these communities, international principles of conservation and the requirements of other cultural communities.

A recent community based restoration work was the reconstruction of the temple at Bhagavati Bahal in Naxal. In 2010, the entire structure was dismantled by the committee that had undertaken the task of improving the dilapidated three-tiered structure. The entire renewal procedure was carried out using local expertise. The structure seems to have been rebuilt practically as it was before. To retain a certain hint of material authenticity, some of the original materials were reused. It was possibly not considered necessary to reinstate the ceramic tiles and murals of deities adorning the external walls of the temple. The temple has cleaned up well to look like other cleaned up temples, losing the scars testifying to its own unique history.

The stainless steel railings protecting the remaining land from the ever widening road are, however, truly out of place. Last year, the Tridevi temples near Thamel were restored by the community. There was enough money collected to replace the tile roofs with copper sheeting. The character of the temples has changed. This, however, shows the traditional progression of upgrading temples when sufficient resources are available. When the community restore their monuments, it verifies a continued cultural attachment that still exists and ensures the sustainable maintenance and upkeep of the facilities.

For the conservation of our cities, a romanticised approach of preserving monuments in their exact material state might be easier to understand and enforce. To allow them to keep living, it would, however, be necessary to find the fine balance, allowing a certain amount of change, for better or for worse.

(The author is an architect and can be contacted through paharnepal@hotmail.com)



Photos: Courtesy Kai Weise



File photo: THT



## UK experts urge lending reform

LONDON: Lenders to Britain’s property sector must change the way they value real estate to avoid a repeat of the meltdown that helped to cause the financial crisis, a report by banking and property experts said. The report by the Real Estate Finance Group (REFG), comprising of senior bank and property figures from companies including Wells Fargo, CBRE Group and Grosvenor, says that reform is needed to curb overenthusiastic lending at the top of the cycle and ensure that banks have



sufficient cash reserves to support post-crash recovery. The REFG was set up to propose a market structure and regulatory regime to guard against the practices that left many banks with portfolios of property loans that exceed the value of the underlying real estate. After years of excessive lending in the run up to 2008, banks such as Royal Bank of Scotland and

Lloyds have been hit by tough capital requirements that have forced a drastic reduction in their lending to the sector. — Reuters

### Merkel urged to ditch rent controls

BERLIN: A sharp rise in rental prices in German cities poses no risk to the broader economy and

introducing rent controls would only exacerbate the problem, economists said ahead of coalition talks between Angela Merkel and the Social Democrats. Chancellor Merkel’s conservatives and the SPD both pledged during the recent election campaign to impose a cap on rents in order to slow the rapid increases seen in



metropolitan areas such as Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Frankfurt. Earlier this week the SPD went a step further, listing such price controls as one of its 10 conditions for entering a ‘grand coalition’ government with Merkel. But a new study on the German property market by the IW Institute in Cologne warned that caps may end up aggravating the supply-and-demand imbalance by curbing investor appetite for real estate, and slowing the construction of new apartment buildings. — Reuters

### AL may challenge SM’s project bid

MANILA: Philippines property developer Ayala Land Inc is considering bidding for a Manila Bay land reclamation project that rival SM Land has already offered to take on for USD 1.3 billion. Ayala Land, the country’s



biggest real estate firm, said it wants the government to give it another 60 working days at least to study a possible counter-bid for the contract to reclaim a 300-hectare area in the bay, which is being developed into a major Southeast Asian casino and resort hub. The deadline for bids is currently November 4. Ayala said in a statement that the timeframe was ‘too short

to develop a master plan (and) study its financial and environmental impact’. There was no immediate comment from the government authorities overseeing the project. SM Land, owned by the Philippines’ richest man Henry Sy, earlier this month made an unsolicited offer to reclaim the bay area in Pasay City, just outside the capital Manila. — Reuters